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NEWS RELEASE

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Good Old-Fashioned Democracy
by Senator Larry Craig

“Democracy is not a fragile flower; still, it needs cultivating.” Like many things Ronald Reagan said, I have found this to be true. The August recess is one of my favorite times of the year, because it gives me the opportunity to spend a good deal of time cultivating democracy by traveling around Idaho, meeting with constituents and holding townhall meetings.

This year, I held 12 townhall meetings in less than two weeks, truly reaching the far corners of the state. I traveled as far south as Malad, down near the Utah border, and all the way up to Bonners Ferry by the Canadian border. Why, you might ask, do I do this?

In a time when politicians seem to be getting more and more insulated from the people who elected them, it is only getting more important for me to get out on the ground and hear from you. The cynics among us might say this is only an election-year ploy to get your vote. Nothing could be further from the truth. For one thing, I am not up for re-election in 2006. But more important, I have been holding townhall meetings every year since I was first elected to represent Idaho’s First Congressional District in 1980, and as long as I am in office, I won’t stop.

It is part of my duty as your senior senator to make every effort to be as accessible as I possibly can. I do my best to answer letters, phone calls and e-mails people send to my offices, but actually being in the same room with people provides a level of interaction that still cannot be replicated by technology.

Because of these meetings, I have been able to get an even better grasp on the issues that concern Idahoans. While Idahoans have a lot of things on their minds, several issues came up repeatedly in many of the meetings: immigration, energy prices, wolves, wilderness and the war in Iraq. Many other issues came up, but these undeniably dominated discussions.

As you may know, Congressman Mike Simpson, who represents Idaho’s Second Congressional District, recently gained House approval for his wilderness bill, the Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA). I have been hearing many widely-varying opinions on this bill, both in support and opposition. I have not yet taken a position on it, and will not until it has had an open and fair hearing before the Energy Committee’s subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests. Up until the moment it passed the House, the bill was changing, so my staff and I are still examining the legislation to see what it contains and what it will mean for Idaho.

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Wolves in Idaho are a different story. Idahoans have had ample opportunity to witness the impact of wolves on our wildlife, livestock, pets and working dogs. As the packs continue to grow and expand their range throughout the state, I will work with Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne, Wyoming and Montana officials, and all other related agencies to get wolves delisted and under control of state agencies. We cannot wait until a human being falls prey to wolves before we act.

For information about what I'm doing to address the difficult issues of immigration, high gas prices and the war on Islamic fundamentalism, please visit my website, <http://craig.senate.gov> and select the Issue Briefing for the relevant issue.

If you couldn't make it to one of the townhall meetings in August, I'm sorry I missed you. You can always call or stop by any of my six regional offices in Idaho, or send me an e-mail through my website. Also, keep your eyes and ears open for the next opportunity to come and visit with me at a townhall meeting, or participate in my "virtual townhall meeting," the podchat. In a podchat, participants can submit questions through my website, and I'll answer them in an audio recording that you listen to on your computer or download onto your portable audio player.

Townhall meetings are a great exercise in democracy at the grass roots, and I truly enjoy the give and take. It is here that we cultivate the flower of democracy and keep it strong.